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Harold Marsh Sewall, the “truculent” consul general at Apia, Samoa, was a member of Maine’s premier shipbuilding and shipping family. As such, he understood the connection between a strong American presence in the Pacific and the health of the nation’s shipping and commerce. His vigorous pursuit of American interests in Samoa, however, cost him his position at the end of the Cleveland administration.

*Maine Maritime Museum photo courtesy of the author.*

# HAROLD MARSH SEWALL AND THE TRUCULENT PURSUIT OF EMPIRE: SAMOA, 1887–1890

By PAUL T. BURLIN

*The conflict between Thomas F. Bayard, Grover Cleveland's first Secretary of State, and his subordinate, Harold Marsh Sewall of Bath, Maine, who was U.S. consul general to Samoa, was not a disagreement about the goals of American policy. Their disagreement related more to tactical considerations. And at that level, generational differences probably drove them apart. Specifically, the meaning of the Civil War for the younger generation of which Sewall was a part may well have contributed to his "truculent" pursuit of empire, a posture that totally unnerved the older Bayard. Paul T. Burlin is Associate Professor of History and Chair of the Department of History and Politics at the University of New England. He is currently working on a book that traces the nineteenth-century connections between Maine and the Pacific. He recently returned from Brazil where he taught U.S. history at the University of São Paulo as a Fulbright scholar. He is a member of the Board of Directors of the World Affairs Council of Maine*

JUST one month from the time he was to leave office himself as a result of Grover Cleveland's loss of the 1888 presidential election, Secretary of State Thomas F. Bayard dismissed Harold Marsh Sewall from his post as consul general to Apia, Samoa. Sewall, a member of a prominent Maine family, had taken the position at Apia with the conviction that America's prosperity depended on global trade connections, and these in turn depended on a strong diplomatic presence in crucial places like Samoa. His conviction, derived from his family's long history in shipbuilding and shipping, was consistent with the nation's growing involvement in global imperial politics in the second half of the century. Thus his summary dismissal in 1889 is something of an enigma.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the dismissal climaxed a year of conflict between the young consular representative and the State Department. Exploring the sources of this tension sheds light on the crosscurrents of values and beliefs that

shaped the American Empire during the late nineteenth century, including the long shadow of the Civil War, which seemed constantly to be in Sewall's way.

Sewall was a native of Bath, a vibrant, seafaring city near the mouth of the Kennebec River. Born in 1860, he grew up amidst the towering masts of the huge vessels built by his family's famous shipyard—some of the largest square rigged sailing ships ever to carry the American flag. In such an environment, Sewall came to appreciate the importance of trade and commerce in maintaining the strength of the American Republic. If ships and the sea were one influence on the young Sewall, another was the Democratic party. Harold's father, Arthur, was a prominent leader in the party, serving several times as a member of the Democratic National Committee. In 1896, he became William Jennings Bryan's vice presidential running mate. Like his father, Harold Sewall was a Democrat.<sup>2</sup>

After graduating from Bath High School, Harold Sewall attended Harvard College and Law School. He was fortunate to graduate when Democrat Grover Cleveland was president, and through his father's political influence, he was appointed vice consul at Liverpool, England, in 1885. His tenure at Liverpool was uneventful. Since the city was a major port of call for the Sewall ships, however, he spent a considerable amount of time facilitating family business. Very ambitious, Sewall aggressively sought a promotion, and he was appointed consul general to Apia, Samoa, in early 1887.<sup>3</sup> Samoa was not a frequent port of call for Sewall ships. Nevertheless, the Pacific was familiar to the Sewalls, as the bulk of their tonnage was involved in deep-water voyages from San Francisco around Cape Horn to the East Coast of the United States or to Europe. As the last decade of the nineteenth century approached, the Sewall vessels gravitated to the Hawaiian sugar trade, carrying the raw product to refineries in the United States.<sup>4</sup>

By the time of Sewall's appointment to Apia, Americans and Europeans had been in Samoa for approximately fifty years. In the late 1870s, with the United States taking the lead, each of the three major foreign powers, the United States, Great Britain, and Germany, signed formal treaties with Samoa. The American treaty granted the United States the right to establish a coal yard at the typhoon-proof harbor at Pago Pago on Tutuila. Another article of the treaty provided that the United States would, if requested by Samoa, exercise its "good offices" were the islands threatened by a third power.<sup>5</sup>

While there had always been a certain uneasiness between the for-

eign powers in Samoa, the situation deteriorated drastically in 1884, when Germany forced the Samoans to sign a new agreement which, if enforced, would have essentially placed the islands under its exclusive control. Thomas Bayard, Grover Cleveland's first Secretary of State (1885-1889), protested this move, but shortly thereafter, the Germans granted recognition to the rebel chieftain, Tuapa Tamasese, in defiance of the established king, Malietoa Laupepa, whom the United States supported. Acting on his own responsibility, U.S. Consul Berthold Greenebaum declared an American protectorate over the islands. Although Bayard disavowed Greenebaum's action, and ultimately replaced him with Sewall, the Secretary of State also called for a three-power conference in Washington to resolve the troubled situation in Samoa.<sup>6</sup>

This was the situation when Sewall was appointed consul general. Before leaving for the South Pacific, he met with the Secretary of State. Their conversation did not bode well for the future. Bayard had heard that Sewall approved of Greenebaum's action in raising the American flag over Samoa and cautioned that this "had created an unpleasant impression in his mind." Nevertheless, Bayard stated that Samoa was important to the United States, and he was opposed to any one power assuming paramount control over the islands.<sup>7</sup> When Sewall left for Samoa, therefore, it was with the distinct impression that the administration in Washington would resist any attempt by another country to assert exclusive control of the island group. He traveled first to Hawaii and from there wrote to his father about rising British influence and the mediocre capabilities of the American officials he met.<sup>8</sup> He then proceeded to his post.

Unbeknownst to Sewall, the Washington Conference was not going well. It broke down over a major point of disagreement between the United States and Germany, concerning the form of the Samoan government and the role of the foreign powers in it. Germany and Great Britain favored a system whereby one nation, Germany, exercised mandatory authority in the islands. Bayard proposed a complicated arrangement with key responsibilities divided among the three powers in order that Germany not attain the upper hand. A few days after Sewall arrived in Apia, Bayard adjourned the conference for a few months to allow each nation to assess the stalemate.<sup>9</sup>

Sewall could not be kept informed about events in Washington on a timely basis because of the lack of a cable connection with Samoa. He arrived with the understanding that Bayard would protect American and Samoan interests at the conference and that the status quo would be re-

spected by all three treaty powers. A State Department communiqué instructed him to advise Malietoa to refrain from taking military action against Tamasese, since the political affairs of the islands were under discussion at Washington. Confident as a result of his earlier conversation with Bayard, he beseeched the king not to take military action against the German-backed faction lead by Tamasese.<sup>10</sup> Sewall quickly concluded, however, that the Germans were a very serious threat to American and Samoan interests. He wrote to Washington that “short as has been my time here, it has brought me in contact with that confidence on the part of the Germans in their early acquisition of these Islands.”<sup>11</sup>

Having extracted a promise from Malietoa that he would not fight unless first attacked, Sewall watched the situation deteriorate. In mid-August, he reported that German warships were expected soon, and their presence would encourage the rebels. Sewall confided to his father his fears that Washington would “back out of Samoa,” and resolved that he would “resign if the Germans are given these islands.” He added that he had “written much and plainly to Washington. I expect some of [the]



In Samoa, the United States supported Malietoa Laupepa (left). Rebel chieftain Tuapa Tamasese (right) gained backing from the German government. Harold Sewall, who had extracted a promise from Malietoa to avoid open warfare, watched with alarm as the situation deteriorated.

*Peabody-Essex Museum photo courtesy of the author.*

subordinates there will take offense. Try and find out.”<sup>12</sup> Shortly thereafter, Germany declared war on Malietoa and installed Tamasese as king. Sewall informed Washington that he had issued a non-recognition proclamation declaring his continued support for Malietoa. In addition, Sewall intervened in a number of ways against the Germans, some of which were covert. In a long letter to his fiancée in Maine, Sewall expressed his frustration with Washington. The State Department was simply not assertive enough with the Germans. Although he was constrained from declaring a protectorate, as Greenebaum had done, Sewall advised the king not to pay the fine the Germans demanded of him. With war declared, Malietoa in hiding, and German sentries posted throughout Apia and in the vicinity of the American consulate, Sewall received a clandestine visit from the beleaguered king and some of his followers. Sewall advised the king to flee into the interior and to ignore the German demand to surrender.<sup>13</sup>

When the State Department received news of the declaration of war, Bayard sent a communiqué to Sewall reserving to the United States all rights in Samoa. The department had “received explicit assurances from Germany” that Samoan independence would not be impaired. The communiqué also warned Sewall not to take sides in the dispute. Washington indicated approval of the non-recognition proclamation and congratulated Sewall on his “dignified and discreet” conduct in very trying circumstances.<sup>14</sup> From this point on, however, relations between Sewall and the State Department became progressively more strained.

It is clear from the letters to his fiancée and his father that Sewall did not believe the State Department was realistic in its assessment of German motives in Samoa. Sewall continued to send urgent dispatches to Washington to make clear his perspective. While Germany might give assurances about respecting Samoan independence, its actions at Apia and elsewhere in the islands belied this. The political control exercised by Germany, Sewall felt, was only preliminary to the commercial supremacy which he believed was the Germans’ chief objective. Behind the German government’s support of Tamasese was the hand of a German commercial company, owner of the largest copra plantations in Samoa. Squeezed by British and American competitors, the company sought to eliminate its rivals through currency manipulation and monopoly over the copra supply. As Sewall pointed out, the Germans supplied arms to the Samoans, and since the islanders had little money, the Germans took mortgages on Samoan land and accepted payment exclusively in copra. Thus they threatened to tie up the entire copra crop, preventing Ameri-

can trade with the islands.<sup>15</sup> Sewall emphasized the great difference between Germany's official statements to Washington and the actual occurrences on the islands:

While war was declared against Malietoa personally it has been waged against the whole people, and although he gave himself up over seven weeks ago peace has not yet been announced to them. As for Samoan independence and neutrality it [sic] no longer exists. German sailors guard the flag of Tamasese, and the German Commodore exercises as effective a protectorate over this Islands as he could if Germany should openly extend one here.<sup>16</sup>

If this was not enough, the Tamasese government, at the behest of the Germans, began imposing new taxes on inhabitants of the islands. Because they lacked cash, Samoans either paid the taxes in copra or mortgaged their land to the German commercial enterprise.<sup>17</sup>

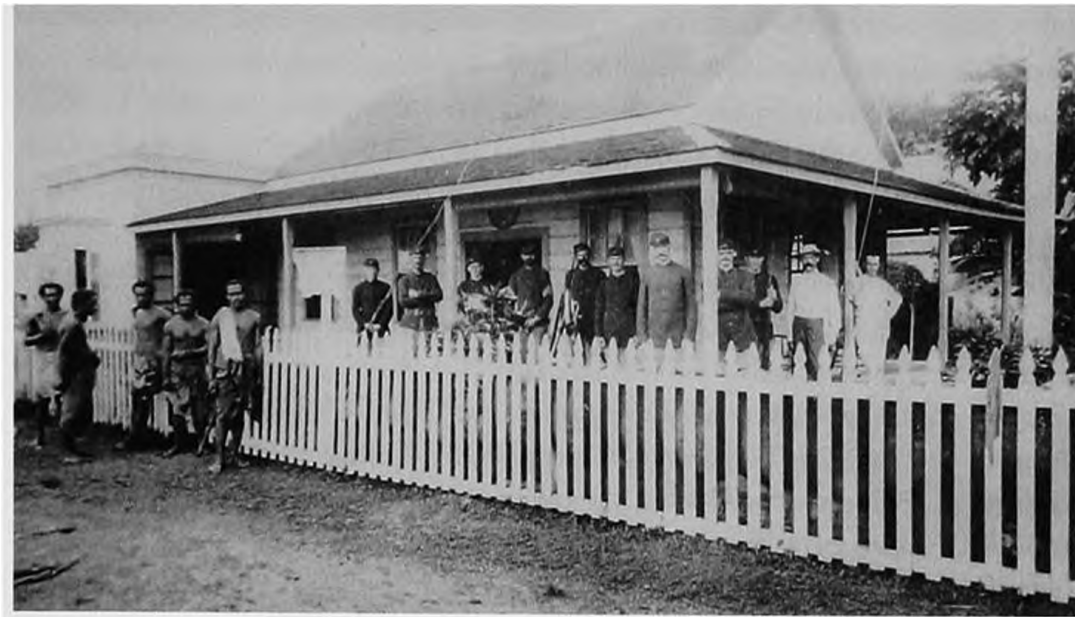
With his frustration clearly showing, Sewall penned a strong personal appeal to Bayard. He resolved, however, not to desert his post, "for I am the only defense the Samoans have now." He would counsel against



With strong German backing and little resistance from the United States, Tamasese, shown here with some of his troops, was able to drive Malietoa from power. Secretary of State Bayard warned Sewall not to take sides in the dispute.

*Peabody-Essex Museum photo courtesy of the author.*





From the consulate office in Samoa, Sewall sent fevered dispatches to Secretary of State Bayard insisting on a more vigorous State Department posture.

*Peabody-Essex Museum photo courtesy of the author.*

opposing the Germans, but, as he informed his fiancée, “I shall finally allow them to fight as the last resort for then they will be heard. The trouble is that our people are ignorant of the history of our relations with these people. If they knew the truth they would feel as I do about it.”<sup>18</sup>

Sewall was equally frank in his letter to the Secretary of State. Acknowledging their previous conversation, he insisted that Malietoa had looked to the United States for sound and disinterested advice and had listened when Sewall advised him against taking up arms. At the time, according to Sewall, “the followers of Tamasese were depressed and disorganized, and the Germans feared the collapse of the insurrection before the arrival of their ships. Malietoa was eager for war, but at my earnest personal solicitation . . . he promised me not to fight, and he kept his word, but with what sad results to himself and his people.”<sup>19</sup> The result was that Malietoa was in exile and his rival, Tamasese, was now king. In a revealing aside, Sewall pleaded: “I am sure, Mr. Bayard, that if you could only understand the situation here, there would be little need of my appeal to you in behalf of these people.” Over the next few months, Sewall continued to send alarmed dispatches to the State Department.<sup>20</sup>

In early January 1888, Sewall received a response. Bayard claimed to understand Sewall’s reaction to the “ruthless aggression by Germany,”

but he could not agree that Malietoa's misfortunes stemmed from the trust he placed in the United States. From Bayard's point of view, the proximate cause of Malietoa's trouble was an ill-advised effort to conclude an alliance with Hawaii. This had aroused German suspicions and emboldened Malietoa, who then behaved imprudently in his conflict with the rebel forces. He also noted that Sewall had received a confidential copy of the Washington Conference protocols; having read them, Sewall should have been aware of the secretary's tenacious efforts to protect Samoan interests. Directing his ire at Sewall personally, the secretary asked: "By what reasoning you suppose my power to be able to encompass these results: I am not informed." German actions, Bayard indicated, violated no international law insofar as the United States was concerned, and to take up Sewall's suggestion would constitute an act of belligerence. He reminded his subordinate that the Executive Branch of the United States government was not constitutionally empowered to declare war and concluded by observing that Sewall would best serve his country's interests by exercising greater "self control."<sup>21</sup>

Sewall responded in a dutiful, if somewhat qualified manner. Noting that he was disappointed "beyond measure" that the United States would not interfere directly with the Germans, he would bear Bayard's words of caution in mind. However, he could not resist reasserting his point of view:

I have feared that impressions unfavorable to the Samoans might result from their ready submission to all that has been done against them. Should such impressions stand in the way of their receiving either the sympathy or the help which they deserve, I beg to have it understood that the fault, if fault there is, is mine. Having kept them from fighting, when I believe [sic] this would have saved them from the sad lot which is theirs, I have sought to make what reparation I could by preserving peace, when war would only expose them to the terrible odds now against them. Should the time come when in the opinion of their friends they should act for themselves, there would be a rising of United Samoa.<sup>22</sup>

Needless to say, Bayard did not take this characterization of the situation as an opening for action. Therefore, throughout his remaining months in Samoa, Sewall continued to report on what he perceived as perfidious German activities. In another private letter to Bayard, he went so far as to call for the use of force to protect American land titles. Noting again that German policies were depriving Samoans of their land, he wrote:

“Cannot something be done for the Samoans themselves to save them from such an exaction and from the loss of what little land is left to them?”<sup>23</sup>

Extremely frustrated, Sewall applied for leave and went to Washington in the fall of 1888. The existing record is sketchy, but it is clear that he attempted to influence policy on a number of different fronts. While guarded in his public statements, Sewall was blatantly and publicly unhappy with current American policy. Hoping to influence policy in Samoa before the presidential election, he met with several political leaders, including George Handy Bates, who had been on a fact-finding mission to Samoa in 1886. As he told his father, he believed a stronger stand on Samoa would be helpful to the president in the election.<sup>24</sup>

After the November election, Sewall had an extended interview with Bayard, who indicated that American policy was to treat the Samoans humanely, to assist them with self-government, and above all to “neutralize the waters of Samoa for the peaceful commerce of the world.” Given these guidelines, “the unjust and even cruel treatment of the Samoans by the Germans” was not a “*causus belli* for the United States.” Further, the State Department had never issued instructions that “warranted [Sewall] in suggesting even that the United States were prepared to interfere by force for the protection of the Samoan King, or his property or that of his people against the action of Germany.” To Bayard, the question was whether the German government was doing anything that directly interfered with American rights, specifically the right to trade or conduct business with Samoa and rights at Pago Pago Harbor. Despite being well aware that the German copra company was behind the unrest, and that it had the tacit support of the German government, the secretary did not waver in his conviction that the United States had no right to intervene. “We had no policy of annexation or protectorate whatever in Samoa or anywhere else outside of the United States.”<sup>25</sup>

Soon after this meeting, Sewall decided to pursue a different tactic. By now, Benjamin Harrison, a Republican, had been elected president. Cleveland and Bayard were lame ducks. Sewall probably talked with William P. Frye, Republican senator from Maine, and a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, because in December Frye called for a Senate investigation of American policy toward Samoa.<sup>26</sup> As a result of this resolution, Sewall was called to testify before a subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, chaired by Frye, on three occasions in January 1889. Sewall opened by pointing out Samoa’s strategic importance relative to American trade routes, indicating that the islands

would become all the more important with the completion of a canal through Central America. Alluding to his conversations with Bayard, Sewall reasserted his claim that Germany should not assume control of Samoa. He drove home his point about passing bad advice to Malietoa when he dutifully restrained the king from fighting Tamasese's forces by saying: "I could not in any way better have served the German purpose than by my mission that day."<sup>27</sup>

It is clear from the testimony that the essence of Sewall's disagreement with the Cleveland administration's Samoan policy came down to one issue. From Sewall's perspective, Bayard was looking for excuses not to strike a more forceful posture. A case in point was the distinction Bayard made between actions taken by the German government and actions taken by private German citizens. From Sewall's perspective, the distinction was specious. As he stated repeatedly, it was a generally recognized fact and a matter of some "notoriety" in the islands that the German government sought to undermine the neutrality and independence of Samoa, but worked through the subterfuge of its private citizens.<sup>28</sup>

The young consul general could not countenance his superior's cautious and legalistic approach. So long as Germany did not interfere with American treaty rights in Samoa, Bayard insisted, no basis existed on which to take action. The secretary repeated that advice to Cleveland at about the time of Sewall's appearance on Capitol Hill. Even if Germany were to annex Samoa, the United States could only demand full respect for treaty rights, something, he pointed out, Germany had always expressed an intention to honor.<sup>29</sup> Sewall pursued a very different perspective: "I think our interference, or a firmness on the part of this Government . . . is the only way to protect the interests we have secured through our treaty in Samoa." Sewall's testimony, coming in such contrast to the stated position of the Secretary of State, caused considerable stir. Although it was heard in executive session, and was apparently never published, much of its thrust was leaked to the press. In letters written to his parents, Sewall indicated satisfaction with his own performance: "If Bayard demands my resignation he can have it, but this will only fan the flames, for the press and public and I believe the [sic] most of our own people are with me."<sup>30</sup>

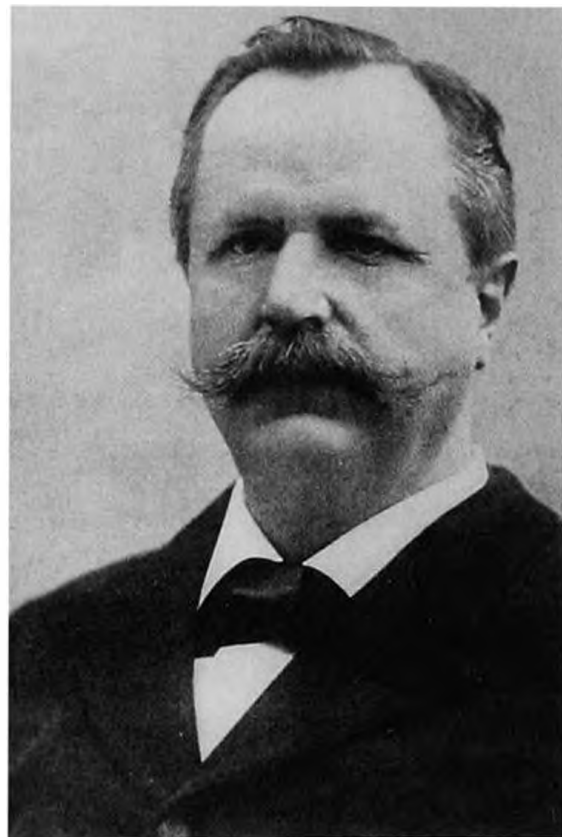
The result, of course, was that Sewall was fired. Ironically, the new Republican administration appointed him a member of the American delegation to a conference in Berlin on Samoa, a belated extension of Bayard's meeting in Washington in 1887. A further irony is that many ac-

counts of the Berlin Conference portray it as a culmination of Bayard's policy, at least in its broad outlines.<sup>11</sup> Following the conference, Sewall went back to Samoa as consul general, where he remained until 1892. His second tour of duty was much less eventful, although he did keep a suspicious eye trained on the foreign powers.

Following his resignation from the consular service in 1892, Sewall renounced his allegiance to the Democratic party, a move triggered by Cleveland's withdrawal of the Hawaiian annexation treaty submitted to Congress in the closing days of his predecessor's administration. For Sewall the refusal to annex Hawaii was yet another demonstration of the Democratic party's wrong-headed foreign policy. With his change in partisan loyalty, Harold Sewall actually campaigned against his father, the Democratic vice-presidential candidate running with William Jennings Bryan, during the 1896 campaign.<sup>12</sup> With McKinley's victory, the younger Sewall was appointed Minister to Hawaii. He remained in Honolulu from 1897 to 1900. When he failed to win appointment as the territory's new governor following annexation, Sewall returned home to Bath where he stayed active in state politics and public affairs for the rest of his life. Although Sewall sought other diplomatic opportunities after

Arthur Sewall, Harold's father, was a prominent leader in the Democratic party, serving in 1896 as William Jennings Bryan's vice-presidential running mate. In 1892 the younger Sewall renounced his allegiance to the Democratic party, and in 1896 he campaigned against his father.

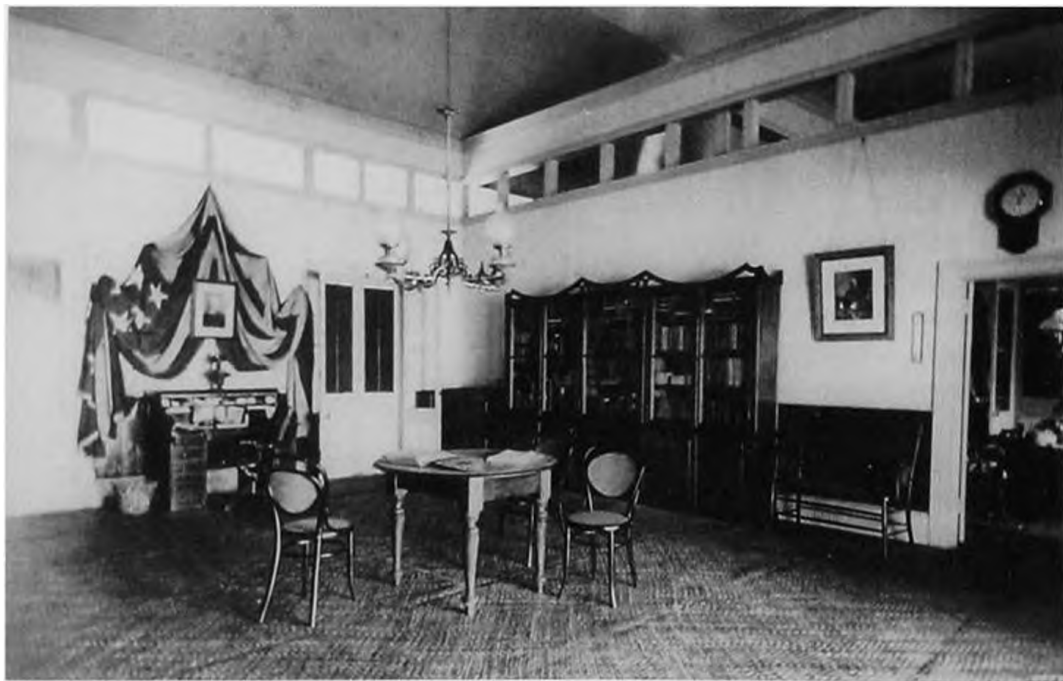
*Photo courtesy Maine Maritime Museum*



returning to Maine, no significant appointments ever came his way again. Sewall died in 1924.<sup>33</sup>

It is time to ask about the significance of this conflict. Were the differences between Sewall and Bayard simply a result of Sewall's character? Was the policy, as some argued at the time, a result of Sewall simply being too headstrong or impetuous? Or was it, as others claimed, just one more relatively meaningless partisan squabble?<sup>34</sup>

Partisan political considerations were evidently important; Sewall believed that if Cleveland took a stronger stance on Samoa the president would enhance his chances for re-election. But after the election Sewall apparently became involved with Frye, a powerful Republican leader in Maine and Washington. This, of course, could be interpreted as opportunism—a young man angling for a new appointment with the Republicans. But if that were the case, then Sewall sought a Republican appointment on the basis of a policy position he had staked out and argued consistently for almost two years. As to Sewall's impetuosity, the Republicans still sent him to the Berlin Conference and back to Samoa, and later McKinley sent him to Hawaii at a time when the president considered that appointment a key to securing the American presence in the Pacific.<sup>35</sup> Nor did the disagreement involve fundamental foreign policy



In 1888 Sewall was dismissed from his post in Samoa by the outgoing Cleveland administration, but he returned during the following Republican administration for a second tour of duty in Samoa, where he occupied this office.

*Peabody-Essex Museum photo courtesy of the author.*

issues; Bayard, like Sewall, believed that the American presence in Samoa was important and should be protected. Bayard's performance at the Washington Conference in summer 1887 suggests that he was a careful steward of American interests in Samoa.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, the long dispatch sent in 1888 to the American minister to Germany indicates that Bayard was neither duped nor acquiescent, as Sewall believed. The dispatch was written in response to accusations by Chancellor Otto von Bismarck that the anti-German attitude and behavior of American consular officials in Apia had caused the trouble in Samoa. After Sewall's critical testimony before the Senate subcommittee, Bayard would come to feel differently about the consul general, but in 1888 he not only defended Sewall but went on to charge Germany with the entire responsibility for the problems in Samoa.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, in the despatch Bayard painted with a broad brush, making no distinction between the motives of private German citizens and those operating in official capacity:

The conclusion at which I am forced to arrive from this review of recent events in Samoa is that the present unfortunate situation there is due not to any action on the part of representatives of the United States, but to the fomentation by interested foreigners of native dissensions, and to the desire exhibited in a marked degree by those in charge of local German interests to obtain personal and commercial advantages and political supremacy.<sup>38</sup>

Bayard was under few illusions regarding German activity in Samoa. The Secretary of State was simply more cautious and prudent than was his younger subordinate. From Sewall's perspective, the threat of force would have safeguarded both Samoan independence and American interests, and his inability to articulate this point of view in Washington was the root of his frustration. Sewall remained enthusiastic about the prospects for a showdown at Apia, even if it meant war.<sup>39</sup>

A deeper issue that separated Sewall and Bayard was the fact that the two men were of different generations. Although it may be commonplace to suggest that youth is imprudent while sage countenance comes with age, the age difference between Sewall and Bayard played out in precise historical terms. In early 1890, after the Berlin Conference but before returning to Samoa under Republican auspices, Sewall gave a speech at Bath high school. He spoke about Samoa and the "humiliation" and "dishonor" the Germans inflicted on the American flag.<sup>40</sup> He alluded to other recent international incidents involving foreigners treating the United States disrespectfully. Taking his moral inspiration from an earlier generation of "boys of Bath High School" who marched

off to sacrifice in the Civil War, Sewall described "the greatest danger" facing the American people as a fail[ure] to maintain a firm and becoming attitude towards other nations. . . . We want in proper national pride. Worthy of emulation is that spirit of military Europe, which everywhere unfurls the country's flag and ever holds it high before the people. Worthy of emulation is that spirit which fosters national sensitiveness and jealousy of national honor, which teaches the people to resent the slightest stain upon it as they would upon their own. Such a spirit we need among us today.<sup>41</sup>

From Sewall's perspective, the American people lacked awareness of the need for "eternal vigilance" and the moral fiber that went with that vigilance. The country's geographical isolation permitted the American people to devote themselves to the development of their riches. With this emphasis on domestic growth, however, there lurked a danger. He cautioned that "as in times of greatest prosperity, we are prone to forget the giver of all bounty, so now when the burden of government touches us so lightly, we are unmindful of what we owe it, and to our flag."<sup>42</sup>

Sewall's speech exhibits a remarkable similarity to sentiments expressed by Theodore Roosevelt, a member of that same post-Civil War generation. Roosevelt believed in the edifying quality of strenuous or heroic exertions and voiced his concern that the materialistic preoccupations of his fellow citizens heralded a period of decline for the United States. Sewall lauded the moral qualities of the Civil War that were exhibited by the generation that fought it, as did Roosevelt, whose well known speech, "The Strenuous Life," is a good example. Speaking during the aftermath of the Spanish American War, amidst the controversy surrounding the acquisition of the new insular empire, the future president cautioned his audience to avoid the life of "slothful ease":

Let us, the children of the men who proved themselves equal to the mighty days, let us, the men who carried the great Civil War to a triumphant conclusion, praise the God of our fathers that the ignoble counsels of peace were rejected; that the suffering and loss, the blackness of sorrow and despair, were unflinchingly faced, and the years of strife endured; for in the end the slave was freed, the Union restored, and the mighty American republic placed once more as a helmeted queen among nations.

We of this generation do not have to face a task such as that our fathers faced, but we have our task, and woe to us if we fail to perform them! . . . If we are to be a really great people, we must strive in good faith to play a great part in the world.<sup>43</sup>



In 1892, at the height of a diplomatic crisis with Chile, Sewall was ready to resign from the consular service and to join the army and the pending fray. Several years later, Roosevelt resigned his position as Assistant Secretary of the Navy and went off to Cuba to fight. Sewall, who was then Minister to Hawaii, was clearly eager for war with Spain. He wrote to his cousin, a partner in the family shipping business, that he thought it would be extremely difficult for the American people to bring themselves to war, and hoped "that AS & Co. have not joined the 'peace at any price' crowd. You will *never* feel right about it afterwards if you have." He lamented his isolation from events and desired to be closer to the action, either militarily or diplomatically.<sup>44</sup>

In 1894, the year Sewall switched political parties and began giving speeches on behalf of the Republicans, Roosevelt wrote to his friend Henry Cabot Lodge, "I thought Sewall's [speech] more than good. It fired my blood to read it."<sup>45</sup> Sewall and Roosevelt had similar backgrounds. Both were born into wealthy and influential families that took some interest in public affairs, and they attended Harvard College at about the same time.<sup>46</sup> They were of a generation born just before the Civil War and grew up in a period dominated by that conflict. Sewall's 1890 speech, with the reference to the Bath boys marching off to battle, is a good example of that phenomenon. Sewall and Roosevelt grew up in the shadow of that cataclysmic event, but neither had participated in it nor had to deal with the compelling issues that it raised. And that, of course, divided them from the political establishment of Thomas Bayard's generation.

It is impossible to argue that the stand one took on the foreign policy issues of the day was simply attributable to age. Yet, there may be suggestive patterns along these lines. Robert Beisner, for example, noted that the anti-imperialists of the 1890s tended to be quite old. David Donald argued that the generational experiences of those who fought for the Confederacy might provide important clues to the origins of the Jim Crow Laws.<sup>47</sup>

A number of historical works have attempted to make the case that the Civil War had a significant impact on the intellectual climate and culture of post-bellum society. Historians suggest that the patrician class, in particular, was profoundly affected. The glorification of the martial virtues and an accompanying disdain for the complacent materialism of the Gilded Age seemed to have been a common reaction by members of this group.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps growing up as a member of the old elite without having participated in the conflict inclined one to a more

bellicose stance in foreign affairs. This attitude seemed morally equivalent to the hard choices made by the previous generation which went off to fight.

Sewall looked for an opportunity to demonstrate the kind of courage, moral fiber, and sacrifice that he attributed to those who left Bath to fight in the Civil War. Almost a decade and a half after the speech he gave at his high school, Sewall still focused on the Civil War as the moral backdrop to the circumstances that faced the American people. Having apparently made a study of the Civil War regiments recruited from Maine, Sewall gave another speech in Bath on Memorial Day 1904, and said that it was both an honor and an embarrassment to address the dwindling ranks of Civil War veterans,

because no one of the generation to which I belong, no one of any generation since the war, can approach the drama of the stupendous struggle without an over-whelming sense of his own unworthiness. And no one can try to lift its curtain, or describe the scenes behind it without a sense of temerity that tempts him to silence.<sup>49</sup>

He discussed the inspiring example of a Bath hero of the Civil War, General Thomas W. Hyde, who was only twenty when he recruited a regiment and went off to fight, and who rose quickly through the ranks by virtue of his daring exploits. Clearly in awe of the valor demonstrated by Hyde, who received the Medal of Honor for his role at Antietam, Sewall noted that the General had written a book in 1894 about the war.<sup>50</sup> As Sewall went on to tell his listeners, Roosevelt had read the book and wrote to Hyde: "To think that we of this generation may never have a chance to prove ourselves worthy of the generation before us."<sup>51</sup> Sewall concluded his speech that day by commenting that "the danger is not in any extravagant eulogy of the soldier or of war, or the flag or the strenuous life, but rather that in these comfortable times we may exalt too much the fruits of peace and forget those who have made these possible."<sup>52</sup>

It seems clear that for some members of the post-Civil War generation the moral example of the great American cataclysm was a recurrent issue. The Civil War challenged individuals such as Sewall and Roosevelt by providing a poignant example of moral choice and self-sacrifice that stood in contrast with the complacency around them. The unworthiness that Sewall mentioned in the later speech was born from not having been tested in a dramatic way. Perhaps the fear of not passing the test,

were it to come along, provoked a truculent demeanor when the country appeared challenged from abroad. It would seem, then, that personal or psychological factors relating to the post-Civil War generation need further exploration in the ongoing debate regarding the evolution of the American empire in the late nineteenth century.<sup>53</sup>

## NOTES

1. *New York Times*, February 4, 7, 9, 1889; *New York World*, February 8, 1889; *New York Sun*, February 8, 1889; Mark W. Hennessy, *The Sewall Ships of Steel* (Augusta: Kennebec Journal Press, 1937), pp. 10, 18; William Hutchinson Rowe, *The Maritime History of Maine: Three Centuries of Shipbuilding and Seafaring* (1948; reprint, Gardiner: Harpswell Press, 1989), pp. 163–164; Basil Lubbock, *The Down Easters: American Deep-water Sailing Ships, 1869–1929* (1929; reprint, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1987), pp. 172–182, 184–189; Paul M. Kennedy, *The Samoan Tangle: A Study in Anglo-German-American Relations, 1878–1900* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); George Herbert Ryden, *The Foreign Policy of the United States in Relation to Samoa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1933); Charles Callan Tansill, *The Foreign Policy of Thomas F. Bayard, 1885–1897* (1940; reprint, New York: Kraus Reprint, 1969), pp. 22–119.

2. Paul Thompson Burlin, “Arthur Sewall: Portrait of a Nineteenth Century Shipbuilder,” *The American Neptune*, 55 (Winter, 1995): 49–65; Dumas Malone, ed., *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Son, 1935), 8: 605–607; *Report of the Class of 1882, Sixth Report, 1907* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1907), pp. 154–157.

3. Arthur G. Staples, *The Inner Man or Some Contemporary Portraits of Prominent Men of Maine* (Lewiston: Lewiston Journal Company, 1923), p. 77; Malone, 8: 606; *Report of the Class of 1882, Seventh Report, 1932* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932), p. 206; Harold Marsh Sewall (HMS) to Arthur Sewall (AS) and Company, April 1, 8, 13, 1886; June 5, 9, 24, 26, 1886, Box # 90, File # 1, Manuscript Collection No. 22, Sewall Papers, Maine Maritime Museum, Bath, Maine. (Hereafter cited as Sewall MSS); HMS to AS, February 9, 12, 1887, Box # 599, File # 9; February 23, 1887, March 21, 1887, Box # 599, File # 10.

4. Earle R. Warren, “On the Brink of War: The Sewall Fleets, 1860–1861,” and “Ocean to Ocean: The Sewall Coastal Trade” (unpublished papers delivered at the Annual Symposium on Maritime History, Maine Maritime Museum, Bath, Maine, May 1975, May 1979). I am also indebted to Mr. Warren for allowing me to review charts he has developed which document the destinations of the Sewall vessels.

5. Kennedy, *Samoan Triangle*, pp. 1–50; Ryden, *Foreign Policy*, pp. 1–206; Tansill, *Foreign Policy*, pp. 3–21.

6. Ryden, *Foreign Policy*, pp. 299–300, 306–308; Tansill, *Foreign Policy*, pp. 32–33; Kennedy, *Samoa Triangle*, pp. 51–55.

7. Samoa—Statement of Harold M. Sewall, . . . Before a Subcommittee of the Committee of Foreign Relations, United States Senate,” (unpublished, January 11–16, 1889), p. 14. A printed copy of the testimony is located in Box # 2, File # 18, George Handy Bates Papers, University of Delaware, Dover, Delaware. (Hereafter cited as HMS Testimony.)

8. HMS to AS, June 7, 1887, Box # 599, File # 11, Sewall MSS.

9. Ryden, *Foreign Policy*, pp. 322–366; Tansill, *Foreign Policy*, pp. 52–67; Kennedy, *Samoa Triangle*, pp. 64–66.

10. HMS to Porter, nos. 9, 10, July 19, 1887, RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, National Archives, Washington, DC. (Hereafter cited as Dispatches/Samoa.)

11. *Ibid.*; HMS Testimony, pp. 14–15.

12. HMS to AS, August 16, 1887, Box 599, File 12, Sewall MSS.

13. HMS to Bayard, telegram, September 8, 1887; HMS to Porter, 25, September 10, 1887, Dispatches/Samoa; HMS to Porter, 24, September 10, 1887; HMS to Anna Ellen Brown (AEB), September 11, 1887, private collection of Camilla Sewall Wood (Hereafter cited as Sewall-Brown Letters).

14. Bayard Memorandum, September 23, 1887, Box 188, Thomas F. Bayard Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC. (Hereafter cited as Bayard Papers.) Also see Adey to HMS, 23, October 13, 1887, RG 59, Diplomatic Instructions/Consular Officers, National Archives, Washington, DC. (Hereafter cited as Diplomatic Instructions/Samoa).

15. HMS to Porter, 31, October 8, 1887, Dispatches/Samoa.

16. *Ibid.*; HMS to Porter, 50, November 7, 1887.

17. *Ibid.*; HMS to Porter, 53, November 23, 1887; 58, 60, December 1, 3, 1887.

18. HMS to AEB, November 15, 1887, Sewall-Brown Letters.

19. HMS to Bayard, November 7, 1887, Box 188, Bayard Papers.

20. HMS to Porter, 53, November 23, 1887; 58, December 1, 1887; 60, December 3, 1887; 73, January 2, 1888; 80, January 4, 1888, Dispatches/Samoa.

21. Bayard to HMS, January 6, 1888; Bayard Memorandum, January 5, 1888, Book 199, Bayard Papers.

22. HMS to Bayard, February 4, 1888, Book 120, Bayard Papers.

23. HMS to Rives, 98, 104, March 27, 1888; 109, April 23, 1888; 118, May 24, 1888; 121, May 25, 1888; 124, June 18, 1888; 148, August 18, 1888, Dispatches/Samoa; HMS to Bayard, March 1, 1888, Book 122, Bayard Papers. Also see HMS to Rives, 118, May 24, 1888.

24. HMS to AEB, December 18, 1887, Sewall-Brown Letters; HMS to Blacklock, August 25, 1888, 54, Apia, Miscellaneous Letters Received/Con-

sular Posts, RG 84, National Archives, Washington, DC.; *Washington Post*, September 21, 1888; HMS to Arthur Sewall, undated, ca. October 1888, Box 599, File 13.

25. Bayard to Pendleton, 280, January 17, 1888, in 50 Congress, 1st sess., House Ex. Doc. No. 238, "American Rights in Samoa," pp. 109–111; Memorandum written by Bayard, November 14, 1888, Book 131, Bayard Papers.

26. U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 50 Cong. 2nd sess., vol. 20, pt.1, 108–109. Also see Tansill, *Foreign Policy*, pp. 100.

27. HMS Testimony, pp.1–2, 4, 14–15.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 15, 54, 58, 69.

29. Bayard to Cleveland, January 1, 1888, Reel # 56, Grover Cleveland Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC (Hereafter cited as Cleveland Papers.); Cleveland to Bayard, December 4, 1888, Book 132; Bayard to Cleveland (handwritten notes), January 5, 1889, Book 135, Bayard Papers.

30. HMS to AS, January 16, 23, 25, 1889, Box 599, file 13; HMS to Emma Sewall (undated; ca. January 1889), Box 600, File 2, Sewall Mss; HMS Testimony, pp. 69–70; *Washington Star*, January 22, 1889; *New York World*, January 25, 1889, in Box 234, Bayard Papers.

31. Blaine to HMS, April 2, 1889, M77, Reel # 155, Diplomatic Instructions of the Department of State, RG 59, National Archives, Washington, DC; *New York Times*, April 16, May 20, 22, June 25, 1889; *New York World*, May 30, 1889. Also see Tansill, *Foreign Policy*, p. 119; Kennedy, *Samoa Triangle*, pp. 87–97; Charles W. Calhoun, "Rehearsal for Anti-Imperialism: The Second Cleveland Administration's Attempt to Withdraw from Samoa, 1893–1895," *The Historian* 48 (February, 1986): 214–216.

32. Harrison to HMS, June 23, 1892, Reel 36, Benjamin Harrison Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.; *Bath Times*; June 27, 1894; *Kennebec Journal*, September 5, 1894; *New York Tribune*, November 1, 1894; *Piscataquin Observer*, August 6, 1896.

33. Malone, *Dictionary*, 16:607; *Bath Times*, October 30, 1924.

34. Morgan to Bayard, December 12, 1888, Book 133; Memorandum by Bayard, February 13, 1889, Book 136, Bayard Papers; *New York Times*, February 1, 1889.

35. See Ryden, *Foreign Policy*, p. 433.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 323–366, especially 346; Kennedy, *Samoa Triangle*, pp. 64–66; Tansill, *Foreign Policy*, pp. 52–67.

37. Bayard to Cleveland, January 28, 1889, Box 203, Bayard Papers; Tansill, *Foreign Policy*, pp. 100–01.

38. Bayard to Pendleton, 280, January 17, 1888, in U.S. Congress, House, *American Rights in Samoa*, House Executive Doc. # 238, 50th Cong., 1st sess., 120; also see 107–108 & 118.

39. See Bayard Memoranda, September 23, 28, 1887, Book # 113; January 8,

1889, Book 135, Bayard Papers; Bayard to Moore, September 9, 1887, Box 22, John Bassett Moore Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC; HMS to Bayard, February 4, 1888, Book 120; March 1, 1888, Book 122, Bayard Papers.

40. Sewall's reference to "humiliation" related to his overall experience in Samoa as well as to a specific incident when an American flag was torn down by Germans. See HMS testimony, 36; HMS to (?) Edward P. Mitchell, October 17, 1888, Box 560, File 11, Sewall, MSS.

41. *Bath Daily Times*, January 11, 1890; *Bath Independent*, January 18, 1890. The latter is located in a scrapbook kept by Emma Sewall, Box # 590, File # 1, Sewall MSS.

42. Ibid.

43. Theodore Roosevelt, *The Strenuous Life: Essays and Address* (New York: Century, 1900), pp. 1, 5–6. Also see Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), pp. 266–278; David Healy, *US Expansionism: The Imperialist Urge in the 1890s* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), pp. 110–126; Howard K. Beale, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Rise of America to World Power* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956), pp. 36–46; Arnaldo Testi, "The Gender of Reform Politics: Theodore Roosevelt and the Culture of Masculinity," *Journal of American History* 81 (March 1995): 1509–1533.

44. HMS to Samuel Sewall, April 7, 1898, Box 600, File 4, Sewall MSS; HMS to William Sewall, January 22, 1892, Box 600, File 3; HMS to AS, April 29, 1898, Box 599, File 18.

45. Roosevelt to Lodge, October 27, 1894, in Theodore Roosevelt, *Selections From The Correspondence of Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge 1884–1918* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), 1:139.

46. Although Roosevelt and Sewall may have become acquainted in the 1890s, no evidence has come to light that they had contact while at Harvard.

47. Robert Beisner, *Twelve Against Empire: The Anti-Imperialists, 1898–1900* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), p. 204; David Herbert Donald, "A Generation of Defeat," in *From the Old South to the New: Essays on the Transitional South*, ed. Walter J. Fraser and Winfred B. Moore, Jr. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981), pp. 3–20.

48. George M. Fredrickson, *The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 151–180, 217–238; T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880–1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), pp. 97–139; Anne C. Rose, *Victorian America and the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

49. *Bath Daily Times*, May 31, 1904.

50. Mark M. Boatner, *The Civil War Dictionary* (New York: David McKay, 1959), p. 421; Thomas W. Hyde, *Following the Greek Cross; or Memories of the Sixth Army Corps* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1895).

51. *Bath Daily Times*, May 31, 1904.

52. Ibid.

53. For a gendered perspective on these issues, see Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).